



Honorable Barry Russell, Chief Judge



Jon D. Ceretto, Executive Officer/Clerk of Court



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Introduction



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Executive Summary

Despite facing our fourth year of declining budgets and involuntary staff reductions, the Court overcame these obstacles and continued to further the administration of justice. Via the innovative application of technology and prudent investment of taxpayer dollars, the Court improved case management processes and our levels of public service. Highlights of our 2003 accomplishments include:

- **Maureen A. Tighe Appointed as Bankruptcy Judge**
On November 24, 2003, Judge Tighe began her fourteen-year term as a bankruptcy judge for the Central District of California. Judge Tighe, who maintains her chambers in Los Angeles, filled the vacancy created when Judge Kathleen P. March returned to private practice. [See page 16]
- **Judge Erithe A. Smith Appointed to the Bankruptcy Appellate Panel**
Judge Erithe A. Smith began her seven-year term on the Ninth Circuit's Bankruptcy Appellate Panel on January 1, 2004, filling the vacancy created when Judge John E. Ryan's term expired. Judge Smith maintains her chambers in the Los Angeles Division, and has served as a bankruptcy judge since 1994. [See page 16]
- **CIAO! Program Implemented District-Wide**
The Court developed and implemented the *Calendar Information and Orders* (CIAO!) application, replacing existing archaic and manual systems. Fully compatible with the Court's *eFile* electronic filing system and NIBS case management system, CIAO! automatically and simultaneously sets judicial calendars from electronically filed motions, prepares orders, creates docket entries, and sends notices of orders via the Bankruptcy Noticing Center (BNC). CIAO! has proven an efficient, cost-effective system for the public, judges, litigants, and court staff. [See page 29]
- **Court Expands *eFile* Program**
Developed and introduced as a pilot program in 2002, the Court expanded *eFile*, its electronic filing system, to accept the electronic filing of Motions for Relief from the Automatic Stay, adversary complaints, and chapter 7 petitions. As *eFile* and CIAO! are interconnected, judicial calendars are automatically set from electronically filed motions and complaints, thereby saving considerable staff labor. [See pages 25 and 30]
- **Clerk's Office Advances Customer Service with Paperless Chapter 7 Case Files**
The Court began maintaining case files for chapter 7 no-asset cases filed on or after October 1, 2003, in electronic format only. Electronic case files result in greater convenience and improved public access, while simultaneously saving labor by eliminating file pulls, archiving, and interfiling tasks. Case file documents can be viewed remotely for a fee using webPACER or free of charge by using computers available in the Court's public lobbies. [See page 26]

■ **Court News Publication Launched**

The Court commenced publishing *Court News*, a bi-monthly newsletter, in July 2003. The newsletter, which is published on the Court's web site, provides a concise, lively overview of the happenings and activities in the Central District. It is designed as a public service for attorneys, bankruptcy professionals, and others who have an interest in the Central District, and also includes up-to-date statistical information and information about large cases. [See page 28]

■ **Desk Reference Manual Revised and Updated**

The Clerk's Office completed an extensive revision of the *Desk Reference Manual* (DRM) in November 2003. Targeted at bankruptcy practitioners, the DRM was updated and reorganized to present Court information more comprehensively, while reducing the size of the manual by approximately 30%. The DRM is available on the Court's web site and is also available for purchase from the contract copy service in each division. [See page 28]

■ **Pro Bono Programs Assist Debtors Throughout the District**

The Court, in cooperation with local bar associations in all five divisions, continued to build upon its history of facilitating legal assistance to low-income and non-attorney represented debtors through *pro bono* programs. *Pro se* debtors filed approximately 26% of all bankruptcy cases in the Central District in 2003, comprising what is believed to be the highest percentage in the federal judiciary. [See page 20]

■ **Digital Court Recording Implemented**

Using technology to enhance public service and Court operations, the Court began replacing existing analog tape-recording equipment with digital equipment in all courtrooms throughout the district. In connection with the implementation of the digital recording system, the Clerk's Office developed a comprehensive training and certification program for Courtroom Services staff. Use of the new equipment began in the San Fernando Valley Division on December 8, 2003, and is expected to be implemented district-wide by the middle of 2004. [See page 31]

■ **Revision of Local Bankruptcy Rules and Court Forms Completed**

A number of changes to the *Local Bankruptcy Rules* took effect on May 1, 2003. Local Bankruptcy Rules 1002-4, 3015-1, 4008-1, 6004-1, 9013-1, 9020-1, and 9075-1 were revised. In addition, nine new Local Bankruptcy Rules forms became mandatory. A new appendix, Appendix IV, *Guidelines for Allowance of Attorneys' Fees in Chapter 13 Cases*, was added to the *Local Bankruptcy Rules*. These revisions helped improve and streamline the bankruptcy process in the Central District. [See page 21]

■ **Judicial Conference Privacy Policy Implemented**

After months of analysis and preparation, the Court extensively modified numerous court forms and automated systems in compliance with the Judicial Conference policy on privacy and access to electronic case files. Implemented on December 1, 2003, the privacy policy significantly impacted operational procedures and necessitated extensive staff training. [See page 34]

■ **Court Maintains Excellent National Ranking for Fifth Consecutive Year**

For the fifth year in a row, the Court achieved an outstanding rank in the *Bankruptcy Program Indicators*. In statistics published by the Administrative Office for the 12 months ending September 30, 2003, the Court continued to rank third among 90 bankruptcy courts and ranked second among large courts (20,000 or more filings per year). The Court has ranked in the top three Courts since the *Bankruptcy Program Indicators* replaced the Case Processing Measures in 1999. [See page 34]

■ **Cost Saving Software Introduced to Create File Folder Labels**

The Court purchased and implemented file folder label-generating software. With electronic chapter 7 case files eliminating most paper case files, the Court ceased purchasing pre-numbered paper file folders. Instead, the Court prints file folder labels for the few remaining paper files on an as needed basis, thereby saving costs. [See page 31]

■ **Mediation Award Presented to Sarah S. Kwak**

In recognition of her work as the coordinator of the Court's Bankruptcy Mediation Program, Sarah S. Kwak, law clerk to Chief Judge Barry Russell, received the *Robert F. Peckham Award for Excellence in Alternative Dispute Resolution* from the United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit in June 2003. [See page 17]

■ **Employee Performance Evaluation Automated**

As part of the Court's transition to a competency-based human resources management system, the Clerk's Office developed an automated performance evaluation program. This program facilitates supervisory efficiency in completing employee performance evaluations. [See page 38]

■ **Permanent Data Archiving System Developed**

In response to the need for permanent and practical long-term data storage, the Court created a Permanent Archive System for storing docket and image data on digital versatile discs (DVDs). Archived case information can be viewed on computers located in each of the Court's public lobbies. [See page 31]

■ **CM/ECF Conversion Work Begins**

In cooperation with the Administrative Office, the Court began detailed preparation for its migration to the national Case Management/Electronic Case Files (CM/ECF) system. CM/ECF will replace NIBS, the Court's existing case management system, and will integrate with eFile and CIAOI, existing Court electronic applications. The Court is scheduled to move to CM/ECF in 2005. [See page 32]

Mission of the Court

The mission of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California is to serve the public by:

- Resolving matters referred to the Court in a just, efficient, and timely manner
- Supplying prompt and accurate information
- Responding fairly and courteously to the needs of the entire community
- Providing leadership in the administration of justice in the bankruptcy system

In fulfilling our mission, the Court recognizes the importance of:

- Demonstrating respect for the dramatic impact that bankruptcy has on the lives of our customers
- Instilling confidence in the competence, impartiality, and ethics of the entire Court

THE BANKRUPTCY JUDGES OF THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

**PHOTO NOT AVAILABLE
FOR PUBLIC VIEWING**

Top Row (From Left):

Arthur M. Greenwald, James N. Barr, Peter H. Carroll, Erithe A. Smith,
Vincent P. Zurzolo, Ernest M. Robles, John E. Ryan

Center Row (From Left)

Alan M. Ahart, Mitchel R. Goldberg, Robin L. Riblet, Geraldine Mund, Sheri Bluebond,
Thomas B. Donovan, Samuel L. Bufford

Front Row (From Left):

David N. Naugle, Kathleen T. Lax, Maureen A. Tighe, Barry Russell (Chief Judge)
Ellen Carroll, Meredith A. Jury, Robert W. Alberts